



MINUTES

BOARD OF EQUAL RIGHTS COMMISSIONERS

April 19, 2017 at 5:30 P.M., Milwaukee LGBT Community Center

Present:

Commissioner Jeffery Roman, Chair
Commissioner Chez Ordonez, Vice-Chair
Commissioner Tony Snell
Commissioner Mayhoua Moua

Absent: Commissioner Sheila Ashley

Jessica Langill, Dept. of Administration
Patricia Ruiz-Cantu, Dept. Of Administration
Ben Roovers, City Attorney's Office
Rebecca Rabatin, DOA Budget & Management
70+ community members

The meeting was called to order at 5:45 p.m. by Commissioner Ordonez with no quorum.
Quorum effective at 6:05pm.

1. Introduction to LGBT Community Center

Introduction given by Karen Gotzler, Director of the LGBT Community Center. She also talked about Give Out Day (4/20/2017) and talked about the services the center offers. Karen also let the audience know about the Milwaukee City ID.

2. Commission Introductions

Commissioner Ordonez began the introductions and each Commissioner talked about their involvement with the Commission and the community. Commissioner Snell also discussed the importance of updating the ERC Ordinance and having a listening session within the transgender community. Commissioner Ordonez introduced Jessica Langill, Equal Rights Specialist and Ben Roovers, Assistant City Attorney. Commissioner Ordonez encouraged the community members to come to meetings and be willing to speak out for their communities. Commissioner Snell recognized Rebecca Rabatin, ADA Coordinator, and Patricia Ruiz-Cantu, Milwaukee Outreach Manager. He also thanked

the center and FORGE and introduced Shelley Gregory (LGBT Center-Transgender Resource Specialist) and Michael Munson (FORGE-Executive Director & Co-Founder).

3. Listening Session Introduction

Shelley Gregory talked more about the Equal Rights Commission and the Chapter 109 City Ordinance. Shelley discussed that gender identity/expression is currently a protected class and employment and housing discrimination against all protected classes in the city of Milwaukee is unlawful. Shelley also encouraged the community members to come to the ERC's monthly meetings. A community member asked when the Ordinance went in to effect and Commissioner Roman talked about the history of the Ordinance and the Equal Rights Commission. A community member asked what would happen if someone filed a discrimination complaint with the ERC. Commissioner Ordonez explained what the ERC is able to do and talked about the protections the ERC could give to transgender communities after the Ordinance rewrite. Ben Roovers also stated it would be considered a civil case and could not be prosecuted criminally. He discussed the process (complaint, review, presentation to commission, possible hearing). Commissioner Snell stated the ERC is hoping to add public accommodation protections in the Ordinance rewrite as well.

Michael Munson went over the guidelines about the listening session and let the community members know that the listening session was being recorded but that all names would be redacted from the public minutes. Michael asked the community to focus on transgender issues but acknowledged intersectionality. He stated the listening session would focus on challenges, ideal world hopes, and success stories.

4. Community Listening Session

A community member stated that she has been homeless for the past five months and has been forced to go to men's shelters because her gender marker on her ID states Male. She expressed her fear of being assaulted at a men's shelter. Another community member echoed her concern and stated he had been forced to go to women's shelters even though he identifies as male.

A community member asked the Commission if they had a goal of making more gender neutral bathrooms available in the city.

A community member stated that at their previous place of employment (a restaurant) an interviewee had been turned away from an interview right away because they were transgender. The community member also expressed feeling a great deal of hate in the workplace.

A community member stated they were told they were not able to use the men's room and had to use a unisex bathroom. The community member stated there did not seem to be enough employer education about bathroom and accommodation laws.

A community member stated that there can be a great deal of confusion and issues with legal names and gender markings on forms.

A community member stated that it was very difficult to find gyms where transgender places could work out and change and feel safe in locker rooms. Another community member stated that they currently work at a University with gender identity/expression protections but that the rules are still very restrictive and unfair to transgender students using the locker rooms. This community member also stated that a big issue was a lack of education about transgender people and the belief that they are predators or will assault children.

A community member stated that they were asked to leave the premises of a bar in Milwaukee because of their gender expression.

A community member stated that they are concerned that the Ordinance rewrite (especially concerning public accommodations) will attract negative attention from the state or national level. This community member stated there needed to be preparation and education happening at the same time of the rewrite so that bathrooms and other public spaces do not become even more unsafe for transgender people in the city of Milwaukee. Commissioner Snell responded and stated that the Commission values education and that they will make sure to reach out to employers.

A community member stated that there need to be more protections for students at school and that they should be able to use the bathroom of their choice.

A community member said there needs to be less censorship from lesbian, gay, and cisgender people toward transgender individuals and that they should not be told not to be angry and that they were supported in the LGB community.

A community member stated that in the current social environment an ordinance rewrite could be very dangerous and bring about negative attention to transgender people, similar to what happened in Charlotte, NC. This community member stated that the transgender community members would be put on the front line after the ordinance rewrite and that they have the most to lose out of all LGBTQ people. Commissioner Ordonez responded and said that even though he is not part of the transgender community, that we are all one community. He stated that the LGB community gets discriminated against, but that he recognizes the transgender community gets the worst of the discrimination. Commissioner Ordonez talked about the importance of speaking up and fighting for the right to be treated like everyone else.

He stated that he will also stand up and be at the front line with the transgender community. He stated the laws have to be drafted and the battles have to be fought to bring about change.

Commissioner Ordonez reminded the audience that any restaurant or bar in the city of Milwaukee must get a license from the city to conduct business. He said that in the future he would like the Commission to speak out at Licensing Committee hearings against any business that discriminates against one of the protected classes, possibly stopping them from getting their license renewed. Commissioner Ordonez stated there is more than one path to social justice.

Michael Munson stated that many transgender people feel that their lives are on the line and that there can be a great amount of fear surrounding what can happen when laws change or ordinances are passed. Commissioner Snell reminded the group that the Ordinance already provides protections for transgender citizens in Milwaukee, but that the Commission is just trying to “amp up” the ordinance. He talked about the pushback that occurred during the fight for marriage equality, but that pushback is worth it to create change for future generations.

A community member stated that in an ideal world they would be able to find their gender identity listed on city forms. They also stated that there is a need for gender neutral/non-binary shelters. They expressed the amount of work that is going to need to be done and that they are not sure if the Commission understands how much work there will be. Another community member also talked about the difficulty of doing legal name changes and changing gender markers on stated IDs.

A community member reminded the Commissioners that they do not face the same scrutiny in the bathrooms as they do. They requested that gender neutral bathrooms are not focused on, but that the Commission focuses instead on more important issues like homeless transgender people and workplace violence/discrimination. This community member asked about the plan the Commission had for working with local employers to make sure rules were followed before there had to be discrimination complaints and issues. Commissioner Snell stated that the Commission had worked with their city attorney to model the Ordinance after other Wisconsin city ordinances. Commissioner Snell stated public accommodations does not only include bathrooms, but that it is much broader.

A community member stated they would like more education provided to the city about non-binary transgender people. They also said as a cisgender ally that they would like to learn ways to assist the transgender community with their struggles.

A community member stated that they had recently moved back to Milwaukee and had faced racial discrimination and had issues with landlords being confused about the

legal name change because they think it could be a potential fraud/criminal activity issue instead of a transgender name change.

A community member stated that no person should have to sit in a hospital bed and question whether or not they would receive adequate care.

A community member stated that they feared that the President and his Cabinet would eventually get around to treating LGBTQ people the way they are being treated in Russia and that if they did not start standing up for themselves they would start losing the rights that they currently have. They said that the ordinance would not mean much once the President starts making laws against the LGBTQ communities.

A community member stated that when they were working with pregnancy doctors that when it was found out that they were a queer couple that they were immediately forced into doing a bunch of STD testing.

A community member expressed how the transgender community was there to support the battle for marriage equality but that they now feel excluded from the LGB community and don't feel that people from the LGB community are willing to fight for their rights. They expressed how scared they are in this political atmosphere.

A few community members expressed their concern about transgender health coverage and issues they will most likely have in the future when it comes to retirement.

Community members shared success stories including employers (Diamond Nexus Labs) and schools (Escuela Verde, Lloyd Barbee Montessori, UWM) that respected pronouns/name changes and allowed people to use the bathroom of their choice, the overall acceptance in Riverwest, assistance with name changes at the DMV, a transgender advocate at the midtown Planet Fitness, and acceptance from TSA while traveling.

Commissioner Roman thanked everyone for their bravery, concern, and suspicions. He stated the Equal Rights Commission is stationed under the Department of Administration at City Hall and that there are many other divisions in DOA that can be potential partners to the ERC. He stated that the ERC can help craft and develop policy proposals that other departments in DOA take to the state and national level. He expressed the importance of the stories from community members that will be used to create and draft needed proposals. He asked the audience to come to the monthly ERC meetings and to continue to collaborate with the Commission.

Commissioner Ordonez stated the Commissioners were there to echo the voice of the community, not be their voice. He stated that what is done in the city of Milwaukee sets

a precedence for other sister communities and what happens in different states. Commissioner Ordonez stressed the importance of educating the community, employers, restaurants & bars, city departments, etc. He also stated that the Commission should work on highlighting businesses that are already being open and affirming.

Commissioner Snell reminded the audience that the ERC is organizing the first Human Rights Day at the City Hall rotunda on December 8th to recognize and educate the community. He reminded everyone to complete the surveys and also encouraged everyone to check out the ERC website and let Jessica know of any recommended changes or additions that should be added to be more helpful to the community.

5. Approval of minutes from March 20, 2017 meeting

Commissioner Ordonez moved to approve the meeting minutes from the March 20, 2017 meeting. Commissioner Snell seconded. Minutes approved unanimously.

6. Next Meeting is Wednesday, May 17th at 2:30pm

7. Adjourn

Meeting adjourned at 7:15 p.m.

* * *

jml